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Walk, Pray, Email

08.13.2011 | Faculty, Catholic

When Brother Frank Deibel, S.M., attends Mass on Saturday, Aug. 13, it won't be only because it's his 103rd birthday.

It's also Deibel's 85th jubilee — the celebration of the day 85 years ago he took his first vows as a brother in the Society of Mary. He and other Marianists celebrating their anniversaries will be honored with a Mass at 4 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 13, in the University of Dayton's Immaculate Conception Chapel followed by a reception and banquet.

At 103, Deibel is the oldest vowed religious man known by the National Religious Retirement Office of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Engaged and alert, Deibel is active every day. He stays in touch with more than 100 friends by email, keeps up with current events, shares his faith with visitors.

And he walks.

A resident of Mercy Siena Gardens, the assisted living portion of Mercy Siena Retirement Community north of Dayton, Deibel walks to Mass daily, walks to visit nursing home residents and walks to pray every day before the statue of Mary, the mother of Jesus, just outside the front entrance to his building.

"I think that's what's kept me going," he says, when asked for his secret to a long life. "Love Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Take a walk every day. Live a good life. Say your prayers and do penance now and then."

Born in Columbus, Ohio in 1908, Deibel started high school in 1922 at the Marianist Postulate at Mount St. John in Greene County, Ohio, a school for boys interested in becoming Marianists as adults.

"For some reason, I had a strong desire to save my soul, and I thought that to become a Marianist would be one good way to save my soul," he said. "The first night we had Benediction; it was so beautiful, I thought I was in heaven."

He professed first vows in 1926, and made his final vows in 1931 in the University's Immaculate Conception Chapel. He graduated from the University in 1929 with a bachelor's degree in English and minors in Latin and Greek.

He taught at Catholic high schools in Ohio for two decades, coming to the University of Dayton in 1954 as an assistant librarian in the University's library, holding that position for nearly 50 years.

He walked the University's campus then, too. Living in Alumni Hall with the Marianist community of priests and brothers, he walked to work when the library was at Albert Emanuel Hall and when it moved to the new Roesch Library.

"I hired students and did reference work," he said, adding that he hired about 60 students every year. "I liked working with the students and still keep in touch with some of them."

He's kept in touch for more than 20 years through his computer, surrounded by photos of Marianists, friends, family and images of Mary. His walls are virtually covered with the memorabilia of a life still brimming with friendship, faith and love.

And while many of those friends are gone, he has many new friendships that span generations. The week before his birthday, he was an honored guest at the wedding of Patrick Hytla '05 and Kathy (Fleming) Hytla '08, University graduates who began visiting him when they were students.

"I have been going to visit Brother D. for almost six years now and he is always a joy to visit," Kathy Hytla said. "He shares emails and jokes and always has a prayer card or sentimental thought to pass out. He is an amazing individual — but he won't

tell you that. He lives his life dedicated to his 'Yes,' and he is a role model for me."

Although Deibel says it's nice that his two celebrations this year are on the same day, he's not too excited.

After all, he's seen a lot of birthdays, celebrated many milestones and walked many miles to pray, share blessings and his zest for life with those who know him

For more information, contact Cilla Shindell, director of media relations, at 937-229-3257 or shindell@udayton.edu (url: <mailto:shindell@udayton.edu>) .